MAHATMA GANDHI'S LETTERS:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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Introduction:

In 1972, Frank Dance and Carl Larson surveyed the field for definition of communication. They found 126 (as cited in Trenholm, S. & Jensen, A.,2008). Even more have been formulated since then. Obviously, a process as complex as communication is hard to summarise or define.

Communication is a process whereby Humans collectively create and regulate social reality. We believe that humans communicate in unique and powerful ways that differ markedly from those by others. Accordingly to Aldous Huxley "…words make us the human being we actually are. Deprived of language we should be as dogs or Monkeys…"

"The living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! I felt the well house eager to learn. Everything had a name; every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange new sight that had come to me," wrote Helen Keller, years after her first realization of what words were (Trenholm, S. & Jensen, A.,2008).

Communication allows us not only to create the world around us but to take possession of it as well. Through communication, we can act on our world. Through communication, we can persuade, dissuade, anger, hurt, comfort, soothe, entertain or bore one another.

While every action of ours could be termed as a way of communication i.e. verbal, non- verbal, sign language, our dress sense, our action etc., communicate can also be of different kind like intra-personal, inter-personal, small-group communication, organizational communication, public communication or mass communication depending upon how and with whom we are communicating.

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When we are alone and communicating with ourselves, it is intrapersonal communication where as if we communicate with another person then it is interpersonal communication. However, one more addition of person changes the character of the communication and becomes small group communication. More the number of people, the communication aspects changes like organizational communication, public communication and mass communication.

Interpersonal communication involves communication between two persons. It can be verbal, non -verbal or through sign language. In both verbal and non-verbal communication, words play the central part.

Face-to-face interaction by two persons or communication over telephone (in addition to VOIP i.e. voice over internet protocol) constitute verbal interpersonal communication, written letters, SMSes, emails etc., could be fall in the category of non-verbal interpersonal communication.

According to 'Wikipedia' ("http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interpersonal_communication- 09-07-2012", "Interpersonal communication is often defined by communication scholars in numerous ways, usually describing participants who are dependent upon one another. It can involve one on one .individuals interacting with many people within a Society. It helps us understand how and why people behave and communicate in different ways to construct and negotiate a Social reality. While interpersonal communication can be defined as its own area of study, it also occurs within other contexts like groups and organizations. Interpersonal communication is the process that we use to communicate our ideas, thoughts, and feelings to another person. Our interpersonal communication skills are learned behaviours that can be improved through knowledge, practice, feedback, and reflection.

Interpersonal communication includes message sending and message reception

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between two or more individuals. This can include all aspects of communication such as listening, persuading, asserting, nonverbal communication, and more. A primary concept of interpersonal communication looks at communicative acts when there are few individuals involved unlike areas of communication such as group interaction, where there may be a large number of individuals involved in a communicative act."

According to Beebe, Beebe,& Redmond, 2002 (as cited by Berger, Roloff, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2010) "Interpersonal communication is a distinctive form of human communication that… is defined not just by the number of people who communicate, but also by the quality of the communication. Interpersonal communication occurs not when you simply interact with someone, but when you treat the other as a unique human being"

Similarly, according to Guerrero, Anderson, & Afifi, (2007) (as cited by Berger, Roloff & Roskos-Ewoldsen,2010), interpersonal communication refers to the exchange of messages, verbal and non-verbal, between people, regardless of the relationship they share… Thus, interpersonal communication includes the exchange of messages in all sorts of relationships, ranging from functional to casual to intimate. These definitions all represent interpersonal communication as involving some form of mutual activity, interaction, or exchange, but they also differ significantly.

Interpersonal communication is not a single process but rather is composed of several interrelated processes that need to be carefully coordinated. These processes include message production, message processing, interaction coordination, and social perception. Besides Interpersonal communication never occurs in the abstract but always in a specific, concrete situation. It is also a social process. There are two or more beings that are mutually oriented towards each other in the unfolding situation. As a species of social interaction, communication

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necessarily involves mutual influence and joint action.

The message centre conception of Interpersonal communication focuses on messages- a particular type of behavioural structure that is generated, interpreted, and coordinated through numerous cognitive, linguistic social and behavioural structures.

This message centric definition emphasizes its fundamentally pragmatic character; people produce and interpret messages to accomplish social goals or functions.

There are four principles of Interpersonal Communication namely 1. Interpersonal communication is inescapable 2. Interpersonal communication is irreversible 3. Interpersonal communication is complicated and 4. Interpersonal communication is contextual. Interpersonal Communication does not happen in isolation. It always happens in a context. The context could be Psychological, Relational, Situational, Environmental and Cultural.

Lazarsfeld and colleagues' work on the 1940s and 1948s U.S. Presidential elections focused on how citizens made vote choices. Two key elements of it were the Limited-effect model and the relationship between mass media and interpersonal communication. While the former holds that the mass media have little impact on public opinion, the latter argues that political information in the media is consumed largely by opinion leaders, and those opinion leaders act as mediators between the media and the broader public. Thus the impact of media is relatively small and largely indirect, with the direct effects of communication in a political context firmly rooted in interpersonal communication (as cited by Benoit W.L. & Holbert R.L in the book by. Berger, Roloff, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2010). This implies that interpersonal communication has a strong role to play in political communication.

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Gandhiji) was considered one of the best communicator at his times. In an age when the infrastructure for mass Communication was restricted to print media in India, and it was under great surveillance of British government, he succeeded as a mass communicator per excellence.

Gandhiji reached his messages to the masses through a judicious selection of oral and non-verbal communication channels. But, with lack of technology, he relied heavily on interpersonal and group communication.

Gandhiji was one of the most prolific writers the world has ever seen, but most of his writings were short pieces in various newspapers and journals of India and the world. Besides, he wrote thousands of letters expressing his views, ideas, suggestions etc., to large number of people during his active public life spanning more than half a century.

More than any other communicator in modern India, Gandhiji used the personal letters as an effective medium to spread his ideas. In fact, it was his numerous letters that he wrote to co-workers, political activists, government officials, to the editors as well as to his own family members, which gives us glimpses of Gandhiji's communication skills. These letters played an important role in his interpersonal communication.

His selection of words in each letter, the form of address, sign-off address to the receiver, presentation of the issues in the letters, use of tools like Metaphors, Similes, Irony, Quotes, Climax, Anti-climax, References etc., provides an insight of Gandhiji's personality as an excellent communicator.

However, gone are those days when written letters used to be an important medium of communication. The 21st century has revolutionalised the entire communication process. Be it the interpersonal communication, mass communication or any other forms of communication, the ICT (Information-

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Communication-Technology) has made the process faster and techno savvy. This has also made the world a 'global village.'

The heralding of ICT era, has given birth to new forms of interpersonal & mass communication which are being termed as Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) and communication through Cell-Phones. E-mails, blogging, chatting, facebook, tweeter, SMS etc. falls under these categories.

Ulla Bunz and Scott Campbell's (2004) research on 'Politeness Accommodation in Electronic Mail' as cited by Trenholm, S. & Jensen, A. (2008) had the objective to see whether convergence could take place in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). The language variable they choose to examine was politeness. The research showed that although certain social cues may be filtered out by e-mail technology, "politeness indicators are communicated, interpreted and reciprocated," allowing communicators to build positive impressions online.

The central theme of this research was to study the syntax in the Computer-Mediated-Communication and its effectiveness as interpersonal communication as compared to the letters written by Gandhiji to different people.

The researcher intends to study the finer points used in the letters by Gandhiji and its impact vis-à-vis the present day communication which, it seems, though has got the speed, lacks courtesy.

Statement/ Definition of the Problem:

1. Impact of inter-personal communication?
2. How Gandhiji, through his letters made resounding impact on the receivers?
3. How differently Gandhiji addresses to different set-of-people in his letters?
4. Whether the use of literary tools in Gandhiji's letters like Metaphors, Irony, Simile, Quotes, Climax etc., has made the communication more effective?

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Objectives:

To study and analyse the use and effectiveness of personalized touch in inter-personal communication, with reference to Gandhiji's letters.

To study whether lack of personal touch in the present day Computer-Mediated-Communication CMC & Mobile communication made interpersonal-communication less effective.

To suggest ways for effective inter-personal communication in CMC for better understanding and effective communication.

Delimitations:

The study will be delimited in terms of contents and samples:

Contents:

1. The study will be delimited to study the socio-cultural touch, humane angle and linguistic aspects like use of literary tools like Metaphors, Irony, Simile, Quotes, anti-climax etc., in the written communications.
2. Although interpersonal communications are of many kind- this study, as the title suggests - will focus on the friendly and non-verbal interpersonal communication.

Samples:

1. Samples will be collected from people in Raipur only. The number of samples selected will be equal to that of the number of Gandhiji's letters selected from CWMG for the study for standardisation of the study.

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Hypothesis:

1. Gandhiji's meticulously selected his words, literary tools etc., to communicate effectively, through his letters.
2. There are distinct variations in letters written to people of different background.
3. Gandhiji used to make political communication through his letters.
4. Present days Computer-Mediated-Communication lacks the personalized touch and hence its effectiveness as compared to Gandhiji.
5. Present day interpersonal communication lacks politeness.
6. Present day email-communication/ SMS communication has though becomes fast, are lacking use of literary tools.

Review of Literature:

The book Interpersonal Communication, by Trenholm, S. & Jensen, A. (2008) had a comprehensive discussion on various aspects of interpersonal communication including perspectives, processes and contexts of interpersonal communication. The book discussed in details about the family interaction patterns, intimate relationships, professional relationships. Cultural & historical influences etc.. Though the book discussed in details about politeness in CMC, common courtesy in CMC, Cell-phone etiquettes, social function etiquettes etc., it has not made any explicit or implicit discussion about interpersonal communication through letters by any individual, let alone Mahatma Gandhi.

The Handbook of Communication Sciences, edited by Berger, C. R., Roloff, M. E. & David, R. R-E. (2010) had extensive discussion on Language & communication, nature of interpersonal communication, interpersonal dimension of health communication, political communication, intercultural communication, computer

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mediated communication and human computer interaction. All these topics have discussed about the theoretical aspects of interpersonal communications but there was no discussion on the subject in reference to any work on interpersonal communication through writing/ letter writing etc..

The Basics of Communication; A Relational Perspective, by Duck, S. & McMohan D.T. (2012) had a topic on Talk & Interpersonal communication where the authors discussed extensively on the interpersonal aspects of spoken words. In another topic titled Technology in Everyday Life, the authors tried to answer as to how people see and use technology in their communication needs (both interpersonal, impersonal and mass communication). The topic has even discussed about relational technologies & personal relations and online communications & personal relationships. The book, however, did not make any discussion on interpersonal communication through letters.

As per available literature, it is evident that, though large numbers of research have been done on interpersonal communication and Gandhiji as a master communicator and his communication strategy to reach out and motivate large number of people during the freedom struggle of the country. However, no such research has been done to analyse the inter-personal communication aspects in the numerous letters written by him.

Taking this in view, the researcher has decided to have a systematic study on the aforesaid aspect.

Methodology & Data collection:

Given the fact that the research would focus on interpersonal communication with reference to Gandhiji's letters, data collection would be done primarily from his letters. The letters have been published in the book

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format named Collective Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG) by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. Besides, data will also be collected from Gandhian writers, Communication Experts, Litterateurs', Editors and philosophers through interview and questionnaires. For data on CMC, textual communication data would be collected from internet and mobile users to find the content of e-mails, SMSs etc., These data will then be subjected through extensive analysis. It would also be subjected through comparative analysis to gauge the effectiveness of Gandhiji's letter vis-à-vis the present day communication mediums for interpersonal communication.

It is proposed to complete the research on the basis of 'Content Analysis' & data collection through questionnaire method.

First the contents in Gandhiji's letters i.e. the essence of the letters, use of literary tools for getting his points/ messages through, his use of words in the beginning as well as in the end of each letters etc., would be studied.

Given the fact that, Gandhiji had written several thousand letters during his life time and there are 100 volumes of his letters published as Collective Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), it is proposed to study his letters on the basis of his letters to political leaders, to social activists, to freedom fighters, to foreign dignitaries, to litterateurs etc.. The researcher proposes to divide the Gandhian period into three broad categories i.e. 1. The period when he was in South Africa and faced with discrimination, initiated movement there i.e. from 1893 AD -1914 AD 2. The period following his return to India and his involvement in mass movements and start of Salt Satyagraha i.e. from 1914 AD-1930 AD 3. The period when he was leading India's freedom movement till his death i.e. from 1930 AD-1948 AD.

It is proposed to select 100 letters each from these three periods on the basis of systematic random sampling. After selection of the letters, they would be subjected to extensive qualitative analysis where contents of each letters would

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be thoroughly studied and analysed. In this process, focus will be on the use of addresses Gandhiji made at the beginning, the use of literary tools like phrases, Metaphors, Irony, Simile, Quotes, etc in the body parts of the letters and their context as well as how he sign-off his letters .

Similarly equal numbers of letters/ communications in the computer communication would be randomly selected from the websites and their contents would also be subjected to rigorous investigation in reference to the use of literary tools, the starting and ending of the letters.

After the two studies, a comparative analysis between the findings from the study of Gandhiji's letters and present day letters would be made.

This content analysis study would however be substantiated by collection of data through interview from Gandhian philosophers and communication scholars.

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Appendix

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